

ALYTES

INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF BATRACHOLOGY

November 1999

Volume 17, N° 1-2

Alytes, 1999, 17 (1-2): 1-2.

1

Editorial

Alain DUBOIS

Laboratoire des Reptiles et Amphibiens,
Muséum national d'Histoire naturelle,
25 rue Cuvier, 75005 Paris, France

This issue of *Alytes* contains three papers that deal with the taxonomy and nomenclature of ranoid frogs, a fascinating research subject that still promises many novelties in the coming decades. Two of these papers include discussions of nomenclatural matters, that were written when the third edition of the *International Code of Zoological Nomenclature* (ANONYMOUS, 1985) was in force. Actually, this edition is still in force at the time of this publication, but for a few months only: in September 1999, the fourth edition of the *Code* (ANONYMOUS, 1999) was published, whose provisions are to replace those of the third edition as of 1 January 2000. Some of the nomenclatural discussions of these two papers will then become irrelevant. Thus, according to the new Article 16, after that date, any new species name will be nomenclaturally available only if "explicitly indicated as intentionally new" and accompanied in the original publication by the explicit fixation of a holotype or syntypes, and by reference to the collection of deposition of this or these specimen(s). These new rules are highly welcome, as they will limit seriously the risk of publication of "phantom names" as defined below in this issue by VENCES et al. (1999). Let us note however that they do not apply to names published before 1 January 2000.

The new edition contains other important changes regarding some articles of the *Code*, that will no doubt be discussed by zoologists worldwide in the coming years. One of them deserves particular attention: the new Article 23.9 introduces the concepts of "reversal of precedence", of "prevailing usage" and of "*nomen protectum*". This article states that, whenever two names are considered synonyms or homonyms, "prevailing usage" must be maintained when "the senior synonym or homonym has not been used as a valid name after 1899", and "the junior synonym or homonym has been used for a particular taxon, as its presumed valid name, in at least 25 works, published by at least 10 authors in the immediately preceding 50 years and encompassing a span of not less than 10 years". Had the word *available* been used instead of *valid* in this article, the latter would have raised no major problem and would have been welcomed virtually by all zoologists. But the use of the term *valid* opens the door for possible abuses and for future problems and discussions. It is no mystery for any experienced taxonomist that many names treated once as "invalid" because they were then considered junior subjective synonyms were later "resurrected" when this subjective synonymy was demonstrated to be wrong. The new article "moderates" the application of the Principle of Priority in this case, to replace it (without naming it) by a so-called "principle of usage". However, there is no doubt that, unlike priority, usage can be "deliberately rigged or manipulated" (DUBOIS, 1995b, 1997). A tendency already exists for some zoologists, when describing a new taxon, to coin a new name for it even if names are

Bibliothèque Centrale Muséum



3 3001 00088845 2

Source: MNHN, Paris

already available and may even be widely known but sometimes "hidden in synonymies" (for recent examples in amphibians, see e.g.: DUBOIS, 1995a, 1998, 1999a-b; DUBOIS & OHLER, 1995, 1998, 1999). The new Article 23.9 may be received by some authors as an encouragement for hasty and careless work, or even for deliberate omission of names published prior to 1900, in order to create "their" names. Ten years is a very short period in taxonomy indeed, and such poor nomenclatural actions may be quickly "validated" through this new article. This would not only, as some previous recent actions and statements, be an insult to the zoologists of the past (some of whom were at least as careful and competent as recent ones), and "to the thousands of authors who have followed the principle of priority (...) and thanks to whom stability has been reached for the very large majority of names" (DUBOIS, 1995c). More importantly, perhaps, this would be liable to strengthen the current progressive growth of a lax attitude of neglect or ignorance of the basic nomenclatural rules in zoology (see e.g. DUBOIS & OHLER, 1997, 1999), that might rather quickly lead to a chaotic situation in this field, as discussed below in this issue (DUBOIS, 1999b).

In view of these potential problems, the greatest attention will be paid, in the coming years, during the review process, to the nomenclatural aspect of papers describing new amphibian taxa submitted for publication to *Alytes*: such papers will be checked to provide all necessary information showing that a careful analysis of the situation has been carried out and that no earlier name is available for any such taxon. Hopefully, all other zoological journals worldwide will follow the same editorial policy.

LITERATURE CITED

- ANONYMOUS [International Commission on Zoological Nomenclature], 1985. – *Code international de nomenclature zoologique*. Third edition. London, International Trust for zoological Nomenclature: i-xiv + 1-328.
- 1999. – *International code of zoological nomenclature*. Fourth edition. London, International Trust for zoological Nomenclature: i-xxix + 1-306.
- DUBOIS, A., 1995a. – The valid scientific names of the Italian treefrog, with comments on the status of some early scientific names of Amphibia Anura, and some articles of the *Code* concerning secondary homonyms. *Dumerilia*, 2: 55-71.
- 1995b. – Discussion draft of the fourth edition of the *International Code of Zoological Nomenclature*: comments. (3). *Bull. zool. Nom.*, 52 (4): 299.
- 1995c. – Comments on the proposed conservation of Hemidactyliini Hallowell, 1856 (Amphibia, Caudata). *Bull. zool. Nom.*, 52 (4): 337-338.
- 1997. – Proposals concerning the conditions needed for a name being eligible for conservation. In: DUBOIS & OHLER (1997): 317-320.
- 1998. – List of European species of amphibians and reptiles: will we soon be reaching "stability"? *Amphibia-Reptilia*, 19 (1): 1-28.
- 1999a. – South Asian Amphibia: a new frontier for taxonomists. Invited editorial / Book review. *J. South Asian nat. Hist.*, 4 (1): 1-11.
- 1999b. – Miscellaneous nomenclatorica batrachologica. 19. Notes on the nomenclature of Ranidae and related groups. *Alytes*, 17 (1-2): 81-100.
- DUBOIS, A. & OHLER, A., 1995. – Frogs of the subgenus *Pelophylax* (Amphibia, Anura, genus *Rana*): a catalogue of available and valid scientific names, with comments on name-bearing types, complete synonymies, proposed common names, and maps showing all type localities. *Zool. Polon.*, (1994), 39 (3-4): 139-204.
- 1997. – Early scientific names of Amphibia Anura. I. Introduction. *Bull. Mus. natn. Hist. nat.*, (4), 18 (3-4): 297-320.
- 1998. – A new species of *Leptobranchium* (*Vibrissaphora*) from northern Vietnam, with a review of the taxonomy of the genus *Leptobranchium* (Pelobatidae, Megophryinae). *Dumerilia*, 4 (1): 1-32.
- 1999. – Asian and Oriental toads of the *Bufo melanostictus*, *Bufo scaber* and *Bufo stejnegeri* groups (Amphibia, Anura): a list of available and valid names and redescription of some name-bearing types. *J. South Asian nat. Hist.*, 4 (2): 133-180.
- VENCES, M., GLAW, F. & BÖHME, W., 1999. – A review of the genus *Mantella* (Anura, Ranidae, Mantelliinae): taxonomy, distribution and conservation of Malagasy poison frogs. *Alytes*, 17 (1-2): 3-72.